Hamas targets more than 70 journalists in anti-protest measures

Gaza journalist: "They beat me with various types of clubs and sticks."

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Hamas Chief Ismail Haniyeh gestures as he speaks during a rally marking the 31st anniversary of Hamas' founding, in Gaza City December 16, 2018. (photo credit: IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA/REUTERS)

More than 70 Palestinian journalists have been targeted by Hamas during the recent protests against economic hardship in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate said on Thursday.

Mohammed Al-Lahham, as senior official with the syndicate, said during a press conference in Ramallah that Hamas's actions were tantamount to "crimes." He said he believed that the number of journalists who were arrested, beaten or summoned for interrogation by Hamas security forces in the past week was much higher than the figures published thus far.

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Several Palestinian journalists who fell victim to Hamas's tough security measures have refused to have their names published by the Ramallah-based syndicate out of fear of being punished by Hamas, the official revealed.

"We have collected testimonies from several journalists who were subjected to various forms of assaults, including arrests, beatings, confiscation of equipment, raids on their homes and threats," Latham said. "A number of journalists have been placed under house arrest and warned not to cover the protests. This ban has affected hundreds of media organizations in the Gaza Strip and is a sign of the magnitude of Hamas terror and intimidation against the media."

Hamas, he added, has also been threatening families of journalists who are currently working outside the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian Authority Ministry of Information strongly condemned Hamas's assaults on journalists and said such actions distort the image of the Palestinians in front of the international community.

Osama Kahlout, one of the journalists arrested by Hamas for covering the protests, said that he and his mother were beaten by Hamas security officers who raided their homes. He said that the officers also searched his office and confiscated his mobile phone. "They beat me with various types of clubs and sticks," he said. "They beat me so hard in my office that I tried to jump out of the window of the first floor to save my life."

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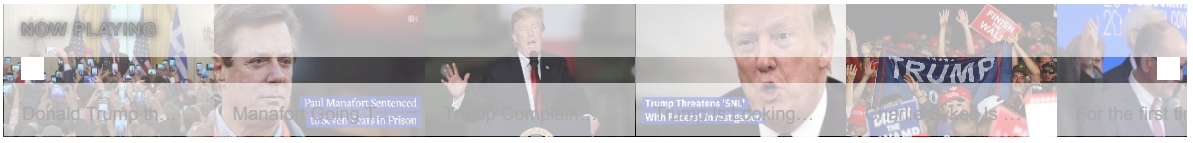

PA presidential spokesman Nabil Abu Rudaineh, who also spoke at the press conference, said that the Palestinians were "facing a ruthless onslaught" by both Israel and Hamas.

He said that although the ruling Fatah faction was under attack, it would not allow the establishment of a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip.

"National unity is a scared thing for us," Abu Rudaineh said. The Palestinian leadership, he added, will soon take "important decisions" with regards to its relations with Hamas, Israel and the US.

Abu Rudaineh claimed that the Americans have asked many parties to act as mediators to convince the Palestinians to end their boycott of the US administration. The Palestinians will not resume their contacts with the US administration unless it backtracks on its decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, he said.

The spokesman accused Hamas of working towards facilitating the implementation of US President Donald Trump's unpublished peace plan, also referred to as the "deal of the century." The US plan, he claimed, calls for the separation of the West Bank from the Gaza Strip, "and this is something that Hamas needs to be aware of."

Meanwhile, several Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip – including Islamic Jihad – said on Thursday that they were trying to persuade Hamas to release all the Palestinians who were arrested during the protests, which were held under the banner: "We Want to Live!" The youth movement behind the protests has called on Palestinians to launch more demonstrations in the Gaza Strip against the high cost of living, soaring unemployment and increased taxes.